

Claudia Comte
Fruits and Jungle

2nd October to 9th November 2019, (preview 1st October, 6pm to 8pm)

Claudia Comte's solo exhibition 'Fruits and Jungle' consists of eight sculptures of suspended fruits and eight comic book-inspired jungle paintings set in the space of KÖNIG LONDON, a former underground car-park. Each sculpture has been carved out of a single block of marble to reveal an over-sized fruit that is seemingly held in place by four vertical columns. Rising from the corner of the plinth, these columns have a visual echo of an extension of the frame of a painting projected into three dimensions. There is an underlying sensual undercurrent to the tension generated by the fruit and the way it indolently squeezes itself around the 'frame' which nominally holds it in place. The sculptures are rendered in white marble, a material suggestive of stability and permanence that stands in contrast to the art historical connotations of fruits; that of mortality, decay and temporality. Yet this is a material that has undergone metamorphosis, changing from what were once seashells that over time became compressed under pressure to produce the white marble of the works. Comte's oeuvre circles back to the memory of materials reflecting on what of the passing of time can be gleaned from a piece of wood or marble.

Comte works between media, often combining sculptures or installation with wall-paintings to create environments where works relate to each other with a visual rhythm that is both methodical and playful. There is the suggestion of a hidden system or sequence at work that determines the relationship of individual works to others as well as the imagery of individual elements (the spacing between lines in wall-paintings for example). In this exhibition Comte surrounds her sculptures with eight canvases. These reference the visual iconography of the Belgian comic artist André Franquin and in particular his comics *Spirou et Fantasio*, *Gaston Lagaffe* and *Marsupilami*. Excess content such as characters and the built environment have been stripped out leaving Franquin's linear backdrops of nature. Comte brings what is normally in the background, that is the landscapes in Franquin's comics, into the foreground. Characters, signs of industry or buildings and the language the characters speak to each other in speech bubbles have all disappeared. For Comte, Franquin's depiction of nature is as animated as the characters and buildings that populate it. The environment becomes the leading character in the story that is left. These abstracted fragments of Franquin's world are pictured interspersed with Comte's more familiar dizzying graphic patterning.

For Comte the potentiality within a line made or drawn by human hand is an area of reflection, from the layering of paint through to the way that the wooden sculptures eventually have every trace of the hand erased despite their genesis via the artist using a chainsaw. There is a play between the specificity of a line within an individual work and the totality of an environment where works combine together and play off each other to form a greater whole. This exhibition, Comte's first solo show in London, draws on themes that the artist has consistently explored in recent years; the combination of the comic or cartoon with a systematic ordering of motifs or grouping of

works; the long-standing interest in materiality and also in the memory of materials. Fruits appear from slabs of marble that were once sea-shells; Images of a jungle appear within the zig-zag of a geometrical system. There is a playful suggestion that a system is at work around the viewer, sometimes on the surface, sometimes beneath the surface, appearing and disappearing, but always just there.

Comte has a forthcoming solo exhibition at Castello di Rivoli (Turin). She has recently had solo exhibitions at Gladstone Gallery, (Brussels and New York), Wenkenhof Villa (Riehen), KÖNIG Galerie (Berlin), Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, Kunstmuseum Luzern. She presented the large-scale installation NOW I WON at the Messeplatz during Art Basel in 2017. Recent group exhibitions include KölnSkulpture #9, Cologne and The Language of Things, with the Public Art Fund, New York.